

## **First Draft**

Minutes of AGM of Highgate Allotments Association,  
Highgate Primary School, Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016

1. **Welcome** The meeting opened at 7.30pm. Jim Greenhill welcomed everyone present – approx. 37 plot holders (including 9 committee members).
2. **Apologies for absence** were received from Celia Barnett, Susanne Cakebread, Joy Collins, Julia Doyle, Saul Estrin, Sarah Frame, Pam Furse, Marc Haynes, John Lane, Zoe Moore, Ann Morris, Ruth Pavey, Martin Rasmussen, Helen Redesdale, Patricia Santos, Wendy Whale and Roger van Zwanenberg.
3. **The minutes of the last AGM (15 October 2015) were approved.**

#### 4. **The accounts for 2015**

Graham Laurie (co-opted Treasurer) presented the accounts for 2015 with comparatives for 2014. These showed bank account balances totalling £20K and stocks of £3325. He outlined steps that are being taken to reduce the stocks and to ensure their correct valuation. The sale in March 2016 of slow-moving items brought in £1200 and there will be another sale before the end of 2016. In future we will hold only 25-30 items of stock, with approx. one year's supply of each item, and stock counts will take place several times a year.

The accounts for 2015 were approved.

#### 5. **Committee reports**

##### **1 HAA Site Secretary Report**

**1.1 Landlord and Administration** Regular site inspections are carried out by the Haringey Allotment Officer to determine whether plots are being maintained in accordance with lease conditions and this has resulted in a small number of lease terminations during the year. Haringey as landlord are intent on dividing larger plots - the HAA committee believe that these should become no smaller than 5 poles – potentially 25 more tenancies. There are currently 172 plots. Access to the Haringey management database promised by the Landlord has not materialised. Resources for administration may become a major issue in the future especially if linked to the demands from possible devolution arrangements.

**1.2 Repairs Budget** Long overdue repairs to the shed roof have been carried out. Regrettably HAA reserve funds (£300) had to be spent on removing plot holders' rubbish from the site entrance area. New wheelbarrows (with solid tyres) and a lawn mower have been purchased. Repairs to tanks and taps have been carried out including expense and work to make good the blue plastic water pipes vandalised on six separate occasions. To date Haringey have not handed over the 2016 repairs budget contribution to HAA due to 'staff shortages' and neither has the promised "capital works" budget been allocated by Haringey - HAA is 'bidding' for

replacement of the road entrance and pedestrian gates which are in a very poor condition.

**1.3 Working Parties** Good work has been carried out by members throughout the year to paint the shed, lay paving and create the barbeque area, as well as mowing the communal plot and paths on the allotment. The next project is to lay a concrete hard standing for eco-compost lorry deliveries and general maintenance around the shed.

**1.4 Parking on the Allotment Site** Parking is restricted to blue badge holders displaying an identifiable valid blue badge - all but a very small minority are to be congratulated for observing this arrangement. Haringey have confirmed that under the lease conditions, persistent abuse may lead to loss of tenancy.

**1.5 Dogs at the Allotment Site** Occasionally plot holders forget to advise visitors or helpers to keep their dogs on a lead. Please remember that it is a lease condition that everyone keeps their dog on a 'leash' at all times.

**1.6 Neighbours** Fortunately there have been no boundary 'land grabs' to report this year, but if you see boundary fences or hedges being worked on please inform the committee who will check it out. Thanks are sent to members from nearby residents for taking care to open and close the entrance gates as quietly as possible.

*Simon Hewitt*

## **2 Lettings Report**

Since the last AGM we have been instructed by Haringey Council to let 25 plots. Of these 24 have been let, and at the time of writing one remains unlet. This is a slight increase on last year when 23 plots were let. At the start of 2016 Haringey Council instructed HAA that any 10 pole plots that become available were to be divided in half for re-letting, because of the Borough-wide demand for allotment gardens.

Of the 25 plots to let, 13 arose from terminations of tenancies by the Council (non-voluntary tenancy terminations) and 11 from voluntary termination of tenancies. One voluntary tenancy termination was to reduce the plot from 10 to 5 poles to make the plot more manageable for that tenant, and so they remain on site on a smaller plot.

Three of the non-voluntary tenancy terminations also resulted in plot division from 10 to 5 poles so that those original tenants also remain as plot holders, albeit on smaller plots. One other non-voluntary tenancy termination resulted in a 10 pole plot being divided into two which were let to two new tenants.

All plots are let on a 3-month probation period. Of the 24 new lets, 11 are to tenants who are still on their probation period and are being supported through this by the HAA Probation Support Officer and other committee members. We wish them luck to successfully complete their trial period and to secure a tenancy. Twelve of the remaining 13 tenants have successfully completed their probation period. We congratulate them all on doing an enormous amount of work in clearing their plots and getting them into or on the way to full cultivation, and we wish them success in the future.

Most new tenants have found the site friendly and supportive. However a number have reported being spoken to, some months ago, in a negative fashion by an existing tenant - so much so that one new tenant felt sufficiently intimidated that they left soon

after they started. That plot was subsequently re-let. This is a worrying and upsetting trend which we hope does not re-emerge. We appreciate that most plot holders are supportive and welcoming of new plot holders.

*Karen Fitzsimon*

### **3 Probation Support Report**

I have been involved in providing information and where possible hands-on advice for new probationers this year. In some cases identifying weeds and existing plants probably helped newcomers to settle in, also looking at methods of plant control and worthwhile approaches to making best use of space and light. All but one probationer made it to full tenancy even though, before their arrival, some plots had been badly neglected.

There are still many overgrown or unproductive trees on the allotments which need drastic attention or even removal, as light and moisture are often limiting factors. Invasive weeds, especially mares' tails, couch grass and so on need sustained suppression.

*Dan Hackett*

### **4 Membership Report**

Eight newsletters were sent out this year by email to 146 subscribers. Newsletters are also posted on the HAA website and one of the Shed noticeboards. The number of email subscribers has steadily increased through the year and now includes the vast majority of ploholders: if you do not receive the newsletter by email but would like to, please let us know either by dropping a note into the HAA Committee postbox on the Shed wall, or by emailing us at [highgateallotments@outlook.com](mailto:highgateallotments@outlook.com).

*Maggy Meade-King*

### **5 Waiting List Report**

The current waiting list stands at 55 applications and can be viewed from the HAA website homepage (no name or address details are visible). Currently the approximate waiting time between application and viewing a plot is around 18 months.

During the 12 month period Oct 2015-Sept 2016, we received 34 new applications onto the waiting list, of which half (17) were applications for joint tenancies. During that period, we moved 44 existing people from the waiting list, so the list has shrunk a little. Fifteen applicants were removed from the waiting list: some had moved away; some were no longer interested; and some did not respond when contacted repeatedly.

*Geoff Kemball-Cook*

### **6 Compost, Rubbish and Chippings**

**6.1 Eco-Compost** Free Eco-Compost is delivered, 15 tonnes at a time, by London Waste, Edmonton. There have been 2 deliveries so far this year, and another is scheduled for 11th November. They do not deliver on weekends. so deliveries are requested for Fridays so that members at work during the week can take their share at the weekend. Members are asked to each take a maximum of 10 barrow loads.

London Waste have requested that in order to facilitate trouble-free deliveries we remove a branch from a plane tree and lay some hard standing. The branch has been removed by private contractor at a cost of £80. The hardstanding is planned for a working party on 16 October: volunteers wanted. An Eco-Compost fact sheet is available on the HAA website under “Cultivation”.

**6.2 Rubbish Collection** This year there have been 2 free council collections and 2 collections by private contractor. As the last council collection was badly abused and the operative refused to take anything that wasn't bagged, a private collection had to be arranged at short notice at a cost of £300. As Haringey are now keeping strictly to their guidelines, combined with a history of abusing the rubbish collection by some members, it has been decided to make individual members responsible for removing their own non-recyclable rubbish. The second private collection was to assist the new probationers on plot Y3A, removing layers of rubbish that had been collected by the previous tenant over many years, at a cost of £120. In future it has been decided that the presence of excessive rubbish on plots should be included in issues addressed by the Allotment Officer when carrying out site inspections.

**6.3 Chippings** We get regular deliveries from three local tree surgeons. Deliveries are free and generally of reasonable quality.

*David Gittings*

## **7 HAA Website**

During the year the following changes (amongst others) were made:

- The HAA plot waiting list was put up on the homepage, so is visible to all
- An Events page was added
- The Documents page was expanded and reorganised to include all HAA Minutes from Committee meetings and documents from AGMs, as well as key information to tenants The website address is <http://www.highgate-allotments.org> Suggestions for modifications or additions to the website are always welcome and can be sent by email to [highgateallotments@outlook.com](mailto:highgateallotments@outlook.com) or left in the HAA Committee postbox on the site Shed.

*Geoff Kemball-Cook*

## **8 Haringey Allotment Forum (HAF) Report**

HAF meets quarterly, and gives an opportunity for site representatives from the 28 Haringey allotment sites to meet with each other and a representative from Haringey's Parks and Allotments Service.

The major issue discussed in HAF public meetings over the year has been the possible “Devolution” of allotment site administration from Haringey Council to local site associations such as our HAA. However, no decision has yet been made by Haringey Council as to whether devolution will take place, and if so in what form and how it would be tailored to different sites. The discussions have therefore been unfocused and frustrating. The main reason given for the suggestion for devolution has been to save money (Haringey Council are required to cut their budget by £60M over three

years), but there is no clarity as to whether devolving administration will actually save money. A deadline of end 2016 has been given for decisions to be made.

Another major issue in HAF meetings has been dissatisfaction across the borough with inaccurate tenants' invoicing and poor or inconsistent communications between Council and site associations or directly with tenants. This may be at least partly due to staff cuts and reorganisations in the relevant departments.

*Geoff Kemball-Cook*

The committee reports were made available before the meeting. Comments and questions were solicited from the floor:

- More information was sought on HAA's links with Haringey Council. Simon Hewitt explained that Haringey Council are currently considering appointing one single allotment officer for the borough which, most probably, will result in much reduced assistance and cooperation. But ours is a well-organised site and we will be well able look after our affairs.
- It was suggested that HAA might apply for a Council grant on top of the repairs grant currently received, as had a local community growing project. The committee felt that, as tenants of Haringey, we might not be eligible. The member who had made this suggestion was asked to provide more information about this grant.
- Worries were expressed about trees on the site. The Council are responsible for the large plane trees along the eastern boundary. Any overhanging branches of other trees on the site may be cut back.

## **6. Election of committee**

Each of the 10 nominees present made a short statement. All attendees eligible to vote marked their ballot papers, selecting a maximum of 10 names. The completed papers were collected and counted by three independent observers.

## **7. Shed shop**

Volunteers are needed to help Jim Greenhill and so ensure the shed shop will be open on Saturdays and Sundays 11am-1pm. Jim thanked Angelo Guarino for his assistance in the past, and also the team of volunteers who have helped with unloading deliveries to the shed.

Dan Hackett suggested we draw up a wish list of products to be stocked.

## **8. Working Party Sunday 16 October 2016**

To increase hard standing to facilitate deliveries of compost. (This would cost £2-3K if done by contractor.)

To remove 2 large sycamores on the communal plot and prune sycamore and ash trees by the entrance gates.

To clear leaves, brambles and rubbish from around the shed.

An offer made of a petrol strimmer/brush cutter. Electricity will be provided by neighbouring householder.

#### **9. Summer BBQ, 9 July 2017**

The 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary BBQ on 3 July 2016 was a great success, and we intend to make a communal BBQ an annual event. Marc Haynes would welcome suggestions and offers of help.

#### **10. AOB**

Thanks were recorded to William Dean, Head of Highgate Primary School, for the use of the school premises for our AGM and committee meetings. Plot holders were encouraged to leave pumpkins and apples by the shed for collection by the school for harvest festivals and 'apple days'.

Jean Morley thanked the committee for their work and achievements.

Asked how the committee sees the future of the allotments and how they might evolve, Geoff Kemball-Cook replied that the committee feels that it has achieved a good level of transparency and that it is making every effort to support tenants. The waiting list is working well (there are currently some 60 people on the list who can expect to wait 14-16 months for a plot), and tasks are efficiently divided between 10 committee members. We cannot know yet how the Council's service will be affected by cuts in funding, but we are able to make our views known and to make suggestions through the Haringey Allotment Forum. Various solutions are being considered, such as raising rents or dividing plots to increase occupancy. We have resisted reducing plots less than 5 poles. Geoff stressed that the quality of our volunteers is of paramount importance in running and maintaining the site.

One member asked how the committee responds to a tenant who is having trouble maintaining his/her plot. He was assured that they respond positively, with an offer of help where possible. But any tenant in such a position must inform the committee so that they can advise the Council Allotment Officer and prevent any definitive action being taken. The committee cannot mediate with the Allotment Officer if they have no knowledge of the problem.

#### **11. Result of election**

The following members were elected to serve on the committee:

David Gittings

Jim Greenhill

Angelo Guarino

Dan Hackett

Marc Haynes

Jack Humphrey

Geoff Kemball-Cook

Hilary Laurie

Maggy Meade-King

Rob Wilson

**12. Presentation to Simon Hewitt and Karen Fitzsimon, retiring committee members**

Simon and Karen were given flowers and a bottle of wine and warmly thanked for all the work they have done and the time they have given to the HAA. Karen, as Lettings Officer, has put in place a rigorously fair and efficient system for plot lettings. She has been a warm and positive first point of contact for new tenants.

Simon has served on the committee for 16 years. As Site Secretary he has been responsible for drawing up a new constitution and for the move to online banking. He has fought 'land grabs' and worked with great patience with the Council.

Simon thanked everyone for the gift, and for their support.

- 13.** Jim thanked everyone for coming and the committee for their work over the past year. The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

**Next committee meeting: Sunday 13 November 2016**

**Next AGM: Thursday 12 October 2017**